

**MESSAGING SYSTEM UTILIZING
PROXIMATE COMMUNICATIONS WITH PORTABLE UNITS**

ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

A method and apparatus for a messaging system (10) comprising a plurality of messaging nodes (14) at geographically distributed and publicly accessible locations, and a plurality of portable messaging units (16) configured to specific user accounts and including message composition, display and storage means. Communication between these portable messaging units (16) and the messaging system, including messaging with Internet addresses, requires that a portable messaging unit (40) be brought to the immediate physical proximity of a messaging node (20), so that a data exchange (90) may be conducted using simple communications equipment such as an infrared link. Messaging nodes (14) preferably include a plurality of docking ports (26) for conducting data exchanges (90) simultaneously with multiple portable messaging units (16). The messaging system (10) includes multiple layers of parallelization, including the separation of user interface activity from the messaging nodes (14), and the inclusion of multiple docking ports (26) on each messaging node (20).